

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 0546

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, CZ, GW

SUBJECT: GOC TREATMENT OF JOURNALISTS: LESLIE COLLITT, NBC-TV

1. ON FEBRUARY 27, LESLIE COLLITT, NBC-BERLIN, TOLD PAO BY PHONE
FOLLOWING SEQUENCE TRANSPIRED WHEN HE RECENTLY TRIED TO APPLY
FOR CZECHOSLOVAK VISA:

2. ON FEBRUARY 16, COLLITT CALLED CZECHOSLOVAK MILITARY MISSION
IN BERLIN (FRG) AND ANNOUNCED HIS INTENTION TO APPLY FOR A CZECHOS-
LOVAK

VISA TO VISIT PRAGUE AND BRNO FAIR IN APRIL. ACTING OFFICE HEAD
KOUBA

TOLD HIM TO COME TO MISSION, WHICH COLLITT DID ON FEBRUARY 21. AT
THAT TIME, ANOTHER CZECHOSLOVAK OFFICIAL OPENED INTERVIEW WITH
COLLITT BY STATING, "I HAVE TO TELL YOU IMMEDIATELY THAT WE
CANNOT ACCEPT YOUR VISA APPLICATION." GAVE AS REASON, "WE CANNOT
HAVE JOURNALISTS INTERVIEWING ENEMIES OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA..COUNTER-
REVOLUTIONARIES...PERSONS IN OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT."

3. COLLITT, WHO TRAVELS WITHOUT HINDRANCE TO OTHER EASTERN
EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, HAS VISITED CZECHOSLOVAKIA NUMEROUS TIMES SINCE
1968, INCLUDING IN JANUARY 1977, WHEN HIS COVERAGE OF THE THEN-
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BREAKING CHARTER 77 STORY RESULTED IN HIS BEING REMOVED FROM A
PRAGUE-BERLIN TRAIN IN EAST GERMANY AND HIS 90 PAGES OF NOTES BEING
CONFISCATED.

4. AMBASSADOR VOICED U.S. SERIOUS CONCERN OVER REFUSAL OF COLLITT'S
VISA APPLICATION TO DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER FEBRUARY 23,
AS DID PAO TO MFA ACTING HEAD OF PRESS DEPARTMENT (PRAGUE 0515).

ANSWER WAS THE SAME IN BOTH CASES: GOC OBJECTS TO "GROSSLY NEGATIVE REPORTING" AND, IN COLLITT'S CASE, CONTACT WITH CHARTER PRINCIPALS.

5. EMBASSY HAS WEIGHED TWO POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION, SINCE DIRECT AND REPEATED PROTESTS TO MFA OVER MALTREATMENT OF U.S. JOURNALISTS HAS SO FAR PRODUCED FEW, IF ANY, POSITIVE RESULTS.

6. OUR FIRST RECOMMENDATION IS THAT DEPARTMENT CONSIDER WITHDRAWAL OF THE VISA RECENTLY ISSUED TO CZECHOSLOVAK TV JOURNALIST OLDŘICH VEJVODA, WHO EXPECTS TO ARRIVE IN THE U.S. MARCH 13 TO COVER THE CP IN THE USA, UNEMPLOYMENT, RACISM, AND URBAN PROBLEMS. VEJVODA WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE A ONE-TIME QUID-PRO-QUO EXCHANGE EXPLICITLY LINKED TO COLLITT CASE, THOUGH IT COULD ALSO BE NOTED THAT IT COMES ON TOP OF REPEATED INSTANCES OF GOC OBSTRUCTIONISM DIRECTED AGAINST US JOURNALISTS VISITING OR DESIRING TO VISIT CZECHOSLOVAKIA SINCE EARLY 1977.

7. EMBASSY COUNTRY TEAM'S SECOND ALTERNATIVE, IF DEPARTMENT DOES NOT CONCUR IN ABOVE DUE TO OUR OWN COMMITMENTS TO THE HELSINKI FINAL ACT, WOULD BE TO HAVE DEPARTMENT'S SPOKESMAN ISSUE A STATEMENT TO EFFECT "DEPARTMENT DEPLORES GOC'S RECENT REFUSAL TO ACCEPT A VISA APPLICATION AT ITS BERLIN (FRG) OFFICE FEBRUARY 21 OF LESLIE COLLIT OF NBC-TV, A RESPECTED AMERICAN JOURNALIST WHO HAS PROFESSIONALLY REPORTED IN SEVERAL COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE DURING LAST SEVERAL CONFIDENTIAL

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YEARS. HTHIS RESTRICTIVE ACTION BY THE CZECHOSLOVAK AUTHORITIES, WHO TOLD MR. COLLITT THEY COULD NOT ALLOW FOREIGN JOURNALISTS TO INTERVIEW HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES, DIRECTLY CONTRADICTS BASKET III PROVISIONS OF THE HELSINKI FIANAL ACT ON FACILITATING IMPROVED WORKING CONDITIONS FOR JOURNALISTS."

8. ADVANTAGE OF FIRST ALTERNATIVE IS THAT IT PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR A DIRECT TRADEOFF, IN ADDITION TO SIGNALLING PRAGUE (AND MOSCOW) THAT WE REMAIN DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER HOW U.S. JOURNALISTS ARE TREATED IN TT EAST. ADVANTAGE OF THE SECOND ALTERNATIVE IS THAT IT MAKES THE SAME POINT PUBLICLY ALBIET LESS FORCEFULLY, WITHOUT DISADVANTAGE OF U.S. APPEARING TO RENEGE ON CSCE COMMITMENTS. PLEASE ADVISE.
FROWICK

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